

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 7, 2020

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable John Barsa
Acting Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20523

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Acting Administrator Barsa,

We are writing to inquire whether you share the assessments of the World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank, and World Food Programme that the COVID-19 pandemic will greatly exacerbate humanitarian crises around the world, and to ask what policies, plans, and programs you have for extending help to the growing numbers of those in need.

The Trump Administration's failures to take COVID-19 seriously, contain the virus domestically, and lead international partners to combat the pandemic have cost countless lives and weakened U.S. influence, standing, and power. *Foreign Policy* reported that you have prohibited U.S. diplomats from even engaging with the WHO, which implements a wide range of life-saving public health programs around the world.¹ Still, it is not too late to limit the health and economic devastation caused by this pandemic. The United States can save lives, strengthen public health security and governance, and prevent population displacement. We hope that you will use this letter as an opportunity to detail your approach to these looming catastrophes, and signal to the Senate Republican leadership that additional emergency supplemental funds are needed to combat COVID-19 overseas.

On September 9, 2020 a World Health Organization report revealed that COVID-linked disruptions to the world's health care systems could cause child deaths to rise globally for the first time in three decades.² This avoidable tragedy underscores the varied impacts the pandemic will have on vulnerable populations. In July, the World Bank forecast that 71 million people worldwide could be pushed into extreme poverty because of the economic fallout from responding to the disease.³ The World Food Programme estimated in April that COVID-19 could

¹ Lynch, C., Gramer, R., and Meakem A. "Trump Administration orders U.S. diplomats to curtail contact with WHO," *Foreign Policy*. September 9, 2020.

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/09/coronavirus-trump-withdraw-world-health-organization-who-state-department-diplomacy-consequences-experts-fear-disease-virus-spread> Accessed September 16, 2020.

² World Health Organization. "COVID-19 could reverse decades of progress towards eliminating preventable child deaths, agencies warn." September 9, 2020. <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/09-09-2020-covid-19-could-reverse-decades-of-progress-toward-eliminating-preventable-child-deaths-agencies-warn> Accessed September 16, 2020.

³ World Bank. "Projected poverty impacts of COVID-19 (coronavirus)." *World Bank Brief*. June 8, 2020. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/brief/projected-poverty-impacts-of-COVID-19> Accessed September 16, 2020.

double the number of people suffering from life-threatening hunger to 265 million.⁴ These grim projections cannot capture the many aid programs that educate, empower, and otherwise assist those in need that either cannot be carried out due to COVID-19, or will have their funding diverted to cover emergent needs. Those living in extreme poverty, refugee camps, and failed states already bear the brunt of these crises, and the impact will only spread with time.

In order to inform the Congress regarding future humanitarian aid legislation, we request your answers to the following questions:

1. Do you agree with the assessments of the World Health Organization, World Bank, and World Food Programme regarding the likely humanitarian impacts triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic? If not, why not?
2. What assessments are you using and what are the key findings of those assessments? How are you using the results of those assessments to inform Department of State and USAID policies, plans, and programs?
3. What additional funding are you requesting to help other nations and international organizations cope with these humanitarian impacts?
4. How have you modified your humanitarian aid policies, plans, and programs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Thank you for your assistance. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Patrick Leahy

Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

⁴ Anthem, P. "Risk of hunger pandemic as coronavirus set to almost double acute hunger by 2020." *World Food Programme Insight*. April 16, 2020. <https://insight.wfp.org/covid-19-will-almost-double-people-in-acute-hunger-by-end-of-2020-59df0c4a8072> Accessed on: September 16, 2020.

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed

Jack Reed
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator